DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 298 700 EC 210 634

AUTHOR Yates, James P.
TITLE Demography As It Affects Special Education.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 6p.; In: Schools and the Culturally Diverse Exceptional Student: Promising Practices and Future Directions; see EC 210 633. Paper presented at the Ethnic and Multicultural Symposia (Dallas, TX, 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; Age; Birth Rate; *Demography; *Disabilities; Dropout Rate; *Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Eligibility; Ethnic Groups; *Futures (of Society); Socioeconomic Status; *Special Education; *Trend Analysis

ABSTRACT

The paper, originally given at a 1986 Ethnic and Multicultural Symposium, looks at special education and the changing society in terms of ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, birth rate, and school completion. Current and emerging demographic characteristics are related to special education policy, organization, training, research, and scholarship. Implications for special education include: differences between emerging demographic characteristics of the country and current demography of special education as a discipline; an expansion of groups eligible for special education services (e.g. children handicapped by sexually transmitted diseases such as acquired immune deficiency syndrome); the possibility of public reaction against increased special services leading to more careful delineation of eligibility; and increased need for educational services by disabled adults. Special educators are encouraged to be aware of demographic trends and prepare to respond to the changing ethnic nature of our society and schools. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED298700

Demography As It Affects Special Education

James R. Yates

One of the most powerful forces affecting education in general, and special education specifically, is demography. While changes in demography are exceedingly important to educators, it is almost totally beyond the control of educators to alter or change the directions of demography. Therefore, educators must familiarize themselves with demographic characteristics in order to formulate appropriate responses by the educational enterprise.

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Age

This country's population continues to grow older. The median age has increased to approximately 32 years for White citizens, and there are more than 30,000 people in the United States who are over 100 years of age. Every week, 210 Americans celebrate their 100th birthday. We have more than 2.2 million people over 85 years of age; significantly, more than half of them voted in the 1980 presidential election. Between 1980 and the year 2000, the number of 85-year-olds in this country will have increased 123% (Longino, 1986). By the year 2000, 75% of all heads of household will be over 45 years of age (Exter, 1986). Obviously, this is a powerful and increasingly politically active group of citizens. One need only look at the effect of having a majority of voters that *DO NOT* have children in school to understand the effects of this large older population upon resources and programs of schools.

Ethnicity

Not only is the U.S. population becoming older, but it is becoming less White. The numbers of Black, brown, and Asian citizens are dramatically increasing, with Hispanics representing the fastest growing population in this country (*Austin American Statesman*, 1986). The Census Bureau reported that as of March, 1985, the Hispanic population in the United States had increased some 16% in a little over 5 years, compared to the national population increase of 3.3%. Hispanics now represent 16.9 million people in the United States, an increase of approximately 2.3 million since the 1980 census. Reich (1986) projects that, by the year 2080, the Hispanic population in the United States, now representing 7% of the population, will have increased to 19%. Currently there are approximately 247 Black mayors in the United States, and almost 6,000 Black elected officials. In 1986, there were 3,202 elected Hispanic officials (Lim, 1986)—an amazing statistic since 65% of the Hispanic population are too young to vote, and some 14% are legally ineligible to vote. The political power and influence of minorities is undeniable in a nation which, by the year 2000, will have 260 million people, one of every three of whom will be either Black, Hispanic, or Asian-American.

EC210634

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Language Minorities

A dramatic and clearly defined increase in the number of language minorities has occurred in this country (Omark & Erickson, 1983). In 1980, there were 14 or 15 major language groups with almost 2,400,000 students between the ages of 5 and 14, and this number of language minority students is projected to increase by approximately one-third by the year 2000. By far, the largest language minority group is Spanish-speaking, with more than two-thirds of the entire language minority population being represented by Spanish speakers. The number of Spanish speakers in this country is projected to increase some 48% between 1980 and the year 2000, numbering more than 22 million persons by the year 2000 (Macias, 1985).

Youth

Not only is the population growing older and becoming less White, but the odds are significantly greater that its youth will be members of ethnic minority groups. Taken together as a group, it is a more frequent phenomenon for ethnic minorities to comprise the majority of public school students. For example, in the state of Texas, 51% of kindergarten students are Hispanic, with the majority of elementary age students being members of minority groups. Before one hastens to associate these demographic shifts with a specific geographic area such as the Southwest, one must remember that Chicago represents the third largest Hispanic population center in the United States (La Familia en Marcha, 1984). It should also be noted that even today more than 50% of the population of the United States resides east of the Mississippi River. Large city school populations are overwhelmingly minority: Miami, 71%; Philadelphia, 73%; Baltimore, 80%; and so forth (McNett, 1983).

These shifts in the ethnic membership of public school populations are not a temporary bubble in the population stream, but rather the emerging future. As mentioned previously, the typical White person in this country is 32 years of age. The American Black is typically 25; the American Hispanic is 22 years of age. It is a rather simple task to determine who will have the most children within the next 15 years. The White population is basically leveling off in terms of women of child-bearing age, while the population of Hispanic women of child-bearing age is increasing dramatically. In addition, Hispanic women have the highest fertility rate of American women, 107 per 1,000 (Schwartz, 1986). A new baby boom will occur, but this time it will be Hispanic (Hodgkinson, 1985a).

Environmental Factors

Major changes have also taken place in terms of the social environment for children born in this country. For every 100 children born today, 12 are born out of wedlock, 40 are born to parents who divorce before the child is 18, 5 are born to parents who separate, 2 are born to parents one of whom will die before the child reaches 18, and 41 reach age 18 having been raised in a "normal" family environment.

Of children born out of wedlock, 50% are born to teenage mothers. Almost unbelievably, very young mothers—13 and 14 years of age—exist. In fact, every day in America, 40 teenage girls give birth to their third child. In 1979 dollars, each child born to a teenager eventually costs taxpayers $18,710 (Burt, 1986). Teenage mothers tend to give birth to children who are premature, of low birth weight, with a significantly higher incidence of major health problems, and in turn, with dramatically increased likelihood of having major handicaps. This group of high risk children is entering the educational system in rapidly increasing numbers.

Socioeconomic status remains a consistent correlate of school learning and learning problems. The Congressional Budget Office (1984) notes that approximately 22% of children under 17 years of age live in poverty and that this number is increasing. Given the corresponding increase in the number of minority children of school age, the known disparity in income levels for minorities and Whites, and continued differentiation and representation of minorities in professional and other high-income-earning activities, it can be conclusively

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

projected that the number of poor children in school will dramatically increase in both real and percentage representation, between now and the year 2000.

Dropouts

It is difficult to obtain reliable data relative to school dropouts. Schools and other agencies have little motivation to collect such data, because these data provide indirect, if not direct, evidence of the failure of the system to serve segments of its population. Once a youngster disappears, she or he is of little interest to the organization. However, the best data appear to indicate that approximately 14% of White students, 25% of Black students, and more than 40% of Hispanic students drop out. Overall, more than 50% of minority students in large cities drop out (Boyer, 1983). Most drop-out statistics are based on cohorts of 9th and 10th graders; however, a recent Texas study of census data indicated that 30% of students drop out prior to the 9th grade (Cardenas & Roblado, 1987). There are fairly significant regional variations in these figures, with some states, such as Minnesota, maintaining better than 86% of their students, while other states, such as Mississippi, maintain barely over 60% of their students. It has been established (Singh, 1986) that school dropouts have the highest rate of children born out of wedlock.

In summary, demographic information indicates that this country's population is growing older and less White. Its children are less secure financially. Public school students are increasingly likely to be minority, and to come from homes where a language other than English is spoken.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

There is a clear difference between the emerging demographic characteristics of this country and the demography of special education as a discipline and in its professional organizations. Special education and its leadership are, at this time, most likely to be White, monolingual, and English-speaking, with special education research, training, and professional development activities generally focused upon areas unrelated to the emerging demographic characteristics of the student population in this country. Issues such as ethnicity, minority status, bilingual education, second language acquisition, nonbiased assessment, socioeconomic status, and so forth are generally perceived by the special education profession as unrelated to special education as a discipline. The configurations of special education and its professional organizations are not greatly incompatible with the past, but are quite discrepant with the emerging future.

Demographic variables suggest the possibility that there will be an expansion of groups eligible for special education services. Some examples of this emerging population would be victims of child abuse, juvenile delinquents, increased numbers of children situationally handicapped due to low socioeconomic status, children handicapped through effects of chemical abuse by their parents, children handicapped by sexually transmitted diseases such as acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) and herpes, and children both younger and older than the traditional age categories currently served by special education. This expanded group of individuals with problems which inhibit their normal progression in the educational system may cause the system to respond in its historical fashion of "dumping" all children who don't fit the institutional norm into special education. These effects may result in special education continuing the current trend of serving larger and larger numbers of mildly handicapped students.

Other variables such as the cost of special education and the general reduction of resources available in education may, however, precipitate a reaction formation to this expanded population for special education services. Such a reaction formation may cause the pendulum to swing back toward services for the more severely handicapped through a more careful delineation of eligibility criteria, primarily through policy and procedure structuring. This

would result in only the defined handicapped individual receiving the unique specialized services of special education.

A number of courses of action appear rather obvious; however, they represent significant and difficult changes to be made within the discipline and the profession. For example, institutions of higher education, as well as others who provide training to special educators, must initiate training programs such as bilingual special education. Such programs exist today in relatively small numbers and with small training capacity. Training programs for regular educators, as well as special education, must begin to include content associated with second language acquisition, English-as-a-second-language instruction, bilingual education, cultural and linguistic uniqueness of student populations, and so forth. If they do not, there is less likelihood that appropriate student referral to special education will occur (Garcia & Yates, 1986).

There are other less obvious incompatibilities within the special education discipline and profession. For example, the name "The Council for Exceptional Children" displays some evidence of incompatibility with the demography. That is, in the future, special education will be faced with an increase in the amount of activity and services, research, and so forth, devoted to and related to adults and older citizens. Therefore, the word "Children," as part of the title of the major special education professional organization, becomes less appropriate as the U.S. population grows older.

As it becomes more acceptable for the older handicapped individual to receive special education services, special education professional organizations may need to reach out and interface with other nontraditional service agencies for special education, specifically organizations serving senior citizens. This outreach effort will, of course, create complex linkages and demand for appropriate "boundary spanners" to link the organizations. The identification and development of such boundary spanners will, in itself, call for unique demands on the special education profession.

Currently, parent and advocacy groups are no better prepared or configured than special education for the emerging changes and shifts in demography. There are fewer Whites of child-bearing age, and as the population becomes more culturally and linguistically diverse, special education parent organizations and advocacy groups must begin to make systemic adjustments in order to remain visible, viable, and influential. Just as special education has historically been powerful in the formulation of legislation and utilization of the judicial system to accomplish aims and goals for the handicapped, it must now, as a discipline and profession, recognize the growing political power of the Hispanic, the Black, the culturally and linguistically different populations in this country.

Recruitment efforts within special education at the level of preservice, continuing education, and practice must focus on bringing larger numbers of language and ethnic-minority individuals into the profession in order to provide appropriate practitioner/researcher/trainer knowledge, role models, and sufficient manpower to address the clearly changing demography of special education futures.

These efforts to recruit appropriate individuals to serve the emerging ethnic- and language-minority population may call for specific review of areas such as certification or licensing requirements of special educators. In the future it may be appropriate, given the percentage of the population represented by ethnic and language minorities, for all teachers, including special education teachers, to demonstrate competence in bilingual education instructional procedures or, at a minumum, English-as-a-second-language instructional techniques.

Since the majority of educators are, in fact, Anglo, monolingual speakers of English, and the composition of the teaching force will not change as rapidly as the ethnic and language composition of the students to be served, there are clear implications for continuing education or inservice training. Specifically, the population of special educators who are currently mostly White must be provided with appropriate training to produce understanding of the educational and learning implications of cultural, language, ethnicity, and learning style differences in the emerging student population. One need only review the range of typical training agendas

provided special educators to recognize that topics ordinarily considered as appropriate in training are, in fact, dramatically different from what is being suggested to prepare the special educator to serve the emerging student population.

In summary, the political, organizational, training, research, and scholarly activities within special education as a discipline and a profession must be alerted and adapted to the powerful and long-term demographic changes occurring in this country.

REFERENCES

Boyer, E. (1983). *High school*. New York: Harper & Row.

Burt, M. R. (1986). Estimating the public cost of teenage child-bearing. *Family Planning Perspectives, 18*(5), 221–226.

Cardenas, J. A., & Del Refugio-Roblado, M. (1987, February). Attrition rates as indicators of school drop-outs. *IDRA Newsletter*, 1–4.

Congressional Budget Office. (1984). *Poverty among children*. Washington, DC: Author.

Exter, T. (1986, October). The Census Bureau's household projections. *American Demographics*, 44–47.

Fiesta Educativa. (1984). *La familia en marcha: Final report*. Chicago: Author.

Garcia, S. B., & Yates, J. R. (1986). Policy issues associated with serving bilingual exceptional children. In A. Willig & H. Greenberg (Eds.), *Bilingualism and learning disabilities: Policy and practice for teachers and administrators* (pp. 113–134). New York: American Library Publishing Company, Inc.

Hispanic population found to be growing rapidly. (1986, January 29). *Austin American Statesman*, A–11.

Hodgkinson, H. L. (1985a). *All in the system: Demographics of education—Kindergarten through graduate school*. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.

Hodgkinson, H. L. (1985b). Teaching tomorrow's students. In S. Roueche (Ed.), *Celebrating teaching excellence* (pp. 29–42). Austin, TX: The University of Texas.

Lim, G. (1986, September 18). Ranks of Hispanics in government showed two percent rise in new study. *Austin American Statesman*, A–12.

Longino, Jr., C. F. (1986, November). A state-by-state look at the oldest Americans. *American Demographics*, 38–42.

Macias, R. F. (1985). National language profile of the Mexican origin population in the United States. In W. Connor (Ed.), *Mexican Americans in comparative perspective* (pp. 285–308). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press.

McNett, I. (1983). *Demographic imperatives for educational policy*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Omark, D. R., & Erickson, J. G. (1983). *The bilingual exceptional child*. San Diego, CA: College Hill Press.

Reich, K. (1986, September 26). Hispanic population likely to double by 2020. *Austin American Statesman*, A–4.

Schwartz, J. (1986, November). Back to work. *American Demographics*, 56–57.

Singh, S. (1986). Adolescent pregnancy in the United States: Interstate analysis. *Family Planning Perspectives, 18*(5), 210–220.

NOTE: The author wishes to express appreciation and to acknowledge Harold L. "Bud" Hodgkinson for many of the conceptualizations and examples he has cited in various publications and speeches relative to demography and its effect upon the future state of the country and its educational system.